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To: Microsoft ATR
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Subject: Concerns about MS settlement

After the WTC attack governments in all countries are reassessing their vulnerability to terrorist attack. Operating systems and the internet now represent essential public infrastructure. Modern corporations absolutely depend on their e-mail, www access, databases etc. Is this infrastructure too valuable to be trusted to a tiny centralized group of people? It would seem that any widely used operating system controlled by a tiny group represents a single point of failure. A perfect target for anyone trying to cause maximum disruption. The vulnerability exists on several levels:

1) A military attack on Microsoft's Redmond campus combined with some assassinations of key people could easily render the company unable to support, develop, and security patch its products. Considering how widely the software is deployed and that Microsoft is trying to convince Telcos, Stock Exchanges, Banks and Airports to use its products this is a scary thing.

2) Viruses like code red were able to propagate so quickly because all Windows boxes are clones of each other. The internet is becoming like an ecosystem with no genetic diversity. A pathogen can wipe out 100% of the population easily once it can kill a single member. We should remember that code red was almost benign. Most of the damage it caused was due the network traffic generated by its propagation. Imagine if it had been malicious (propagate for 2.5 hours then reformat). It would have made the WTC attack look like someone bombing a mailbox. The extraordinary market share of Microsoft has made us extremely vulnerable to this sort of attack.

3) Free markets with lots of competitors are like democracies and tend to result in product excellence and satisfied consumers. Consumers vote with their dollars. Monopolies on the other hand are like empires. An empire can be well governed but if the emperor is a tyrant then everyone suffers. Is Bill Gates a good emperor? Who will succeed him if he were killed? What if we get a tyrant?

4) If anything happens to the software vendor responsible for our public infrastructure then its customers are left high and dry. With no access to the source code and unable to purchase service contracts, many other companies could fail along with the software vendor.

5) Since the source code for MS software is kept secret and is accessed by a tiny group programmers there is a lot of opportunity for coders to write backdoors or time bombs into the software. Who is doing the background checks on these programmers? It should also be noted that the whole world is dependant on this tiny group of programmers for security fixes. For example consider the vulnerability in IE reported on November 1st that took 3 weeks to fix. Should

this tiny group of programmers be responsible for deciding which bugs should be fixed and when then get fixed? What if the entire programming team were assassinated?

.Net is Microsft's attempt to centralize things more than ever. So the single point of failure problem is going to get worse rather than better. Fifteen years ago PCs were nifty gadgets adored by computer geeks. In such a niche market a monopoly is tolerable. Today PCs are as important as phone lines, railroads, hospitals and highways. Allowing a single company to control these is absurd. Considering the civil rights that citizens are being asked to surrender in the name of safety from terrorism should large monopolies not also be required to surrender some of their ownership, control and copyright?